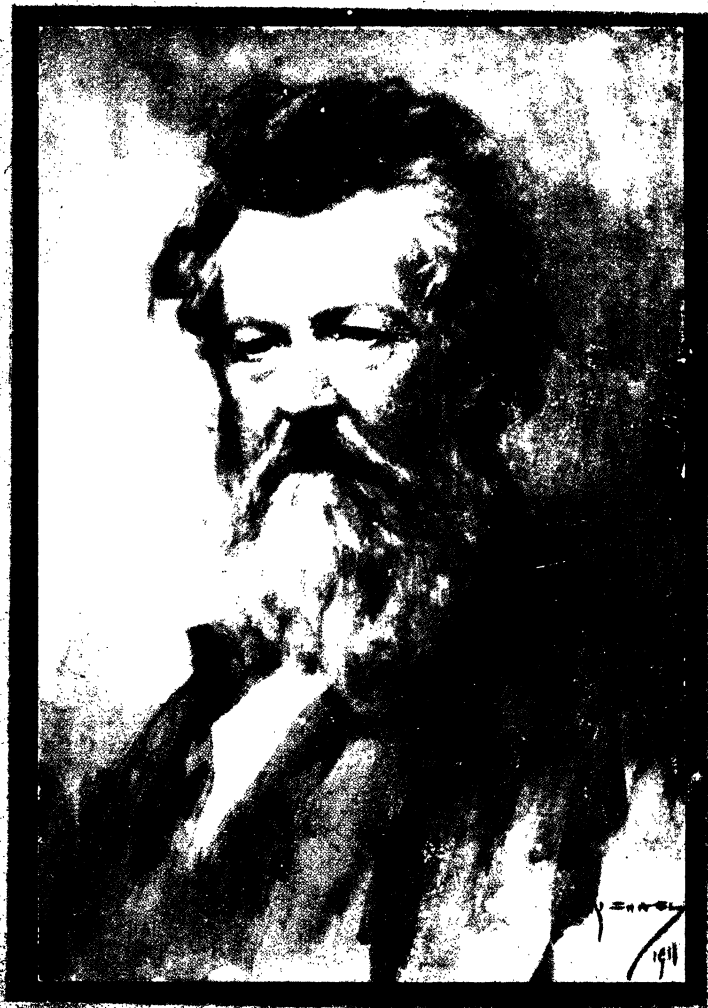


WILLIAM MORRIS



DAYS WITH THE POETS

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Jan. 27, 1927





THE SAILING OF THE SWORD.

O, russet brown and scarlet bright,
 When the Sword went out to sea,
My sisters wore ; I wore but white :
 Red, brown, and white, all three ;
Three damozels ; each had a knight,
 When the Sword went out to sea.





A · DAY · WITH
WILLIAM
MORRIS
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A DAY WITH WILLIAM MORRIS.

O June, O June, that we desired so,

Wilt thou not make us happy on this day?

Across the river thy soft breezes blow

Sweet with the scent of beanfields far away.

The Earthly Paradise.



His own lines are running in the head of William Morris, as, at sunrise,—that is to say about three o'clock—on a mid-summer morning of 1879, he thrusts his rough dark head out of the open window, and sees the river shimmering past between the branches of great elms in fullest leaf. The very breath of June is in the air, “full of atoms of summer,” and the fertile earth is aglow with warm loveliness. From all the length and breadth of green English shires, to Morris in his house by London river, the voice of beauty calls, and he responds to it. “O me! O me! How I love

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the Earth !” he murmurs, “and the seasons, and weather, and all things that deal with it, and all that grows out of it, . . . the earth and the growth of it and the life of it ! If I could but say or show how I love it !” His vagrant thoughts go homing to their dearest goal, that lovely old-world Kelmscott village in Oxfordshire, after which his present abode is named, beside its “far-off, lovely mother of the Thames.” He loves to think that this same grey sunlit water which sparkles at his feet, has come down to him past the gables and the gardens of Kelmscott, a hundred and thirty miles away. . . . He dreams a moment of those far green meadows, pure and perfect yet as very Eden : he sees them as he saw the fields in *Summer Dawn* :

Pray but one prayer for me 'twixt thy
closed lips,
Think but one thought of me up in the stars.
The summer night waneth, the morning
light slips,
Faint and grey 'twixt the leaves of the
aspen, betwixt the cloud-bars,
That are patiently waiting there for the
dawn :

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Patient and colourless, though Heaven's
gold
Waits to float through them along with
the sun.
Far out in the meadows, above the young
corn,
The heavy elms wait, and restless and cold
The uneasy wind rises ; the roses are dun ;
Through the long twilight they pray for
the dawn,
Round the lone house in the midst of the
corn.
Speak but one word to me over the corn,
Over the tender, bow'd locks of the corn.

But William Morris is not alone a "dreamer of dreams, born out of due time," any more than he is the "idle singer of an empty day." Essentially, ineradicably, first and foremost, he is a man of action. He has just aroused himself from that sleep of dreamless profundity which he can take, as he puts it, in solid bars : and from which he passes into a waking life of immediate and strenuous energy : he never does anything by halves. In ten minutes he has dressed and started work. His dressing, as

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may be inferred, is a rough-and-ready matter : it is, indeed, effected without the aid of a mirror, for he hates mirrors and will not have any in the house. His rough blue serge is that of a workman, not a *littérateur* : and his general appearance, it must be confessed, is that of a slovenly and unkempt magnificence. His extraordinary and abundant hair, with its thick strong curl "like wrought metal,"—his massive head with its vague inexpressive eyes and beautifully-moulded mouth,—his fine build and height, dimly indicative of almost super-human strength,—his clumsy-looking but exquisitely adroit hands,—all these traits have combined to produce that "rum and indescribable deportment" which is at once the delight and despair of his friends.

He has resolutely turned away from the window,—switching off, so to speak, that "romantic element which makes one side of his life one long dream,"—and has taken up the other side of his life,—that steady, assiduous, unremitting, almost stolid laboriousness which has made him the man he is. "I do not hope to be great at all in anything," he wrote in

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earlier days, "but perhaps I may reasonably hope to be happy in my work : and sometimes when I am idle and doing nothing, pleasant visions go past me of the things that may be."

Nowadays, it may be said, he is *never* idle: mind, or hands, or both, are always busy. Work has become his ideal, his solace, his panacea for all ills. "I tried to think," he has declared, "what would happen to me if I am forbidden my ordinary daily work : and I knew that I should die of despair and weariness." And indeed, it is not easy to see how this strong and passionate man, possessed of superabundant vitality and tremendously powerful physique, could find outlet for his exuberant energy except by actual manual labour.

His loom is set up in his bedroom : he is already weaving there,—now, in the first soft light, busied upon the lovely warp and woof of his "cabbage and vine" tapestry. Sometimes he will stay at this for eight or nine hours,—sometimes, as to-day, other labours claim his attention ; and he toils all the more resolutely for knowing that his time at the loom must be short.

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In the making and dyeing of textile fabrics, William Morris has found a means of expression particularly apt to his peculiar modes of thought. To him the mediæval method is "so much the best that it is the only one"; and, not content with reviving mediæval romance in his 'prose and verse, he continues to compose, as it were, in more tangible materials, but always with the same underlying idea. Simplicity of utterance, romance of plot, gorgeous pageantry of colour,—these are characteristic of his work both in words and in things. To "make the common as though it were not common", an ideal which has been already expounded in the art of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, is a fair definition of the unusual quality which suffuses all the achievements of William Morris. And, even as, in the *Earthly Paradise*, "the lambent rosy light, the misty lunar atmosphere, shot with faint auroral colours, the low and magical music, the ever-varying panorama of poetical description and passion and thought" have struck an entirely new note in English poetry,—so the same words, very nearly, may be used with reference to the material effect wrought out by William Morris in the field of decorative and

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textile art. You cannot think of him as a poet without considering him as the master-craftsman, the designer,—the architect,—the weaver,—the dyer,—the artisan-artist *in excelsis*. He is able to express in one art, it would appear, that which the technique of another denies him. He can create a new atmosphere in his poems ; but in textiles he can, it is said, create new colours : amethyst with tender flushings of red and gold which takes on the tincture of a sunset sky, and blues so cunningly intermingled with green that no existing colour-name may define them. This poignant joy in colour has always been his ; it is conspicuous in his earlier poems, where splashes of splendid primary hues are almost the *raisons d'être* of certain lyrics. The drawing and the painting are missalesque in their quaint and realistic detail, in such poems as *The Sailing of the Sword*,—

Across the empty garden-beds,
 When the Sword went out to sea,
I scarcely saw my sisters' heads
 Bowed each beside a tree.
I could not see the castle leads,
 When the Sword went out to sea.

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Alicia wore a scarlet gown,
When the Sword went out to sea,
But Ursula's was russet brown :
For the mist we could not see
The scarlet roofs of the good town,
When the Sword went out to sea.

Green holly in Alicia's hand,
When the Sword went out to sea ;
With sere oak-leaves did Ursula stand ;
O ! yet alas for me !
I did but bear a peel'd white wand,
When the Sword went out to sea.

O, russet brown and scarlet bright,
When the Sword went out to sea,
My sisters wore ; I wore but white :
Red, brown, and white, all three ;
Three damozels ; each had a knight,
When the Sword went out to sea. . . .

Or, in that "very harmless and spirited ditty . . . which had once the knack of simply infuriating the grave and precise," *Two Red Roses across the Moon*,—the colour-notes pre-dominate:—

There was a lady lived in a hall,
Large in the eyes, and slim and tall ;
And ever she sung from noon to noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

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There was a knight came riding by
In early spring, when the roads were dry ;
And he heard that lady sing at the noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

Yet none the more he stopp'd at all,
But he rode a-gallop past the hall ;
And left that lady singing at noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

Because, forsooth, the battle was set,
And the scarlet and blue had got to be met,
He rode on the spur till the next warm
noon :—
Two red roses across the moon.

.

You scarce could see for the scarlet and
blue,
A golden helm or a golden shoe ;
So he cried, as the fight grew thick at the
noon,
Two red roses across the moon !

Verily then the gold bore through
The huddled spears of the scarlet and blue ;
And they cried, as they cut them down at
the noon,
Two red roses across the moon !

.

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Under the may she stoop'd to the crown,
All was gold, there was nothing of brown ;
And the horns blew up in the hall at noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

The big dark weaver's lips move silently, and his filmed inscrutable eyes shine faintly with a lambent light : he is thoroughly enjoying himself. "No work which cannot be done with pleasure is worth doing : " that is one of his cardinal maxims : "Time was when anybody that made anything, made a work of art beside a useful piece of goods, *and it gave them pleasure to make it* : whatever I doubt, I have no doubt of that." One of Morris's main objects in life is to bring this simple, long-forgotten truth home to the hearts of his fellow-workmen : and how hard a task he finds it ! For in modern days, as once in the origins of language, work and pain are synonymous : and pleasure is divorced from labour by reason of the *tertium quid* which we know as money. But in the manual arts, as in literature, Morris perpetually endeavours to "take up and continue the dropped threads of the mediæval tradition," when "honest labour wore a lovely face" ; and he denies the superiority of verbal or literary

THE LADY OF THE FALCON.

Softly she walked with eyes cast down,
Nor looked she any other than
An earthly lady, though no man
Has seen so fair a thing as she.

(The Watching of the Falcon).



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construction over any other : all are equal in his eyes. "That talk of inspiration," says he, "is sheer nonsense : there is no such thing : it's a mere matter of craftsmanship . . . If a chap can't compose an epic poem while he's weaving tapestry, he'd better shut up : he'll never do any good at all."

So now you behold him carrying out his own principle, and framing noble phrases in his mind, while his deft fingers manipulate the threads of the web.

Having concluded the appointed hours at the loom, Morris,—who even during his work has frequently paced to and fro, restlessly padding round the room or oscillating between his weft and the window—goes down to his study on the ground floor—a room of severe simplicity. No carpet is there, no curtains ; shelves of plain unpolished oak, heavy-laden with books, cover most of the wall space : a square table of the same plain oak carries his writing-tackle : a few austere chairs are placed about. The books, like the room, afford little clue to their owner's *penchants*. They are

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a most haphazard collection, mainly' yellow-backed novels picked up on railway journeys. Morris, the jealous hoarder of invaluable mediæval volumes, is careless in the extreme as regards his modern authors, and losing books is almost a habit with him. His tastes, moreover, are by no means eclectic : he is a rapid but not a great reader. A chosen few in the world of literature are dear to him, and all the others but so much empty letterpress. Milton he abominates, Wordsworth he detests : in Shakespeare he has no great interest : for Browning and Tennyson, twin idols of the period, he has cared very little since his youth. But Keats, "Keats for whom I have such boundless admiration, and whom I venture to call one of my masters," and to whom he closely approximates in the tone and quality of his work,—sits enthroned in his heart : and among prose writers of the day he accords first place to Carlyle and Ruskin. The latter he reveres as a truly great and wise master, "not only in matters of art, but throughout the whole sphere of human life." Fiction does not greatly appeal to Morris : yet, with that queer twist of the anomalous so often discoverable in men of great

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genius, he has three favourite writers who are about the last people one could have guessed. He is devoted to George Borrow : he is soaked and steeped in Dickens : and above all he is an enthusiast regarding the adventures of Mr. Jorrocks. This last is an inexplicable matter. Morris is no horseman : he knows little and cares less about any sport save angling. Howbeit, he has, for many years, "in the moods when he was not dreaming of himself as Tristram or Sigurd, identified himself with Joe Gargery" (*Great Expectations*) or Mr. Boffin (*Our Mutual Friend*), to such an extent that his favourite salutations are quotations from these worthies : and he insists on ramming Jorrocks down the throats of his friends, in season and out of season, to their bewilderment, and, *bien entendu*, not infrequently to their boredom.

Morris, standing carelessly over his table, sets down a few score lines, the result of his morning's meditations. He can write anyhow, anywhere, under any interruption : the leisurely seclusion of the professional author has no charms for him. His exquisitely beautiful calligraphy, originally a slovenly and illegible

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scrawl, is the result of years of work spent on illuminating, and on the study of painted books of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It is now analogous to that delicate and marvellous detail, that skill in the embroiderer's and the goldsmith's art, which are so evident in the intricately-wrought yet broadly-designed effects of his verse. "The happiness of epithet and of local colouring" which obtain in *Jason*, and, still more, in the *Earthly Paradise*, "the picturesque detail and the appropriate phrase which give life and individuality to his pictures, are for the most part known only by their effects, and only fully appreciated in the retrospect." Morris's greater poems are mainly unquotable, because you must take them as a whole : to detach a few lines from their context is equivalent to cutting away a piece of cornice to proffer as an example of a sublime cathedral. For this reason, he will never achieve the enormous popularity of such poets as Tennyson or Longfellow : because, to the average man or woman, great architecture is less alluring than a small well-furnished house. An impression of vastness overhangs and overawes the mind : but little domesticities can insinuate themselves into its

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closest corners. Of William Morris's earlier poems,—the *Defence of Guenevere*, the *Haystack in the Floods*, and the rest of that noble company—it has been said that “they seem to be lifted out of poetry, to have, besides poetry, a substance of visible beauty of one particular kind; to be partly without any notion of being poetry, or effect or aim at it.” Yet “caviare to the general” though the earlier poems may be, who can shut his ears against the sensuous loveliness of such lyrics as that “sweet song not sung yet to any man,” fragrant as a flower, the water-nymph's lullaby in *Jason*?

I know a little garden-close,
Set thick with lily and red rose,
Where I would wander if I might
From dewy dawn to dewy night,
And have one with me wandering.

And though within it no birds sing,
And though no pillared house is there,
And though the apple boughs are bare
Of fruit and blossom, would to God,
Her feet upon the green grass trod,
And I beheld them as before.

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There comes a murmur from the shore,
And in the place two fair streams are,
Drawn from the purple hills afar,
Drawn down unto the restless sea ;
The hills whose flowers ne'er fed the bee,
The shore no ship has ever seen,
Still beaten by the billows green
Whose murmur comes unceasingly
Unto the place for which I cry.

For which I cry both day and night,
For which I let slip all delight,
That maketh me both deaf and blind,
Careless to win, unskilled to find,
And quick to lose what all men seek.

Yet tottering as I am, and weak,
Still have I left a little breath
To seek within the jaws of death
An entrance to that happy place,
To seek the unforgotten face
Once seen, once kissed, once reft from me
Anigh the murmuring of the sea.

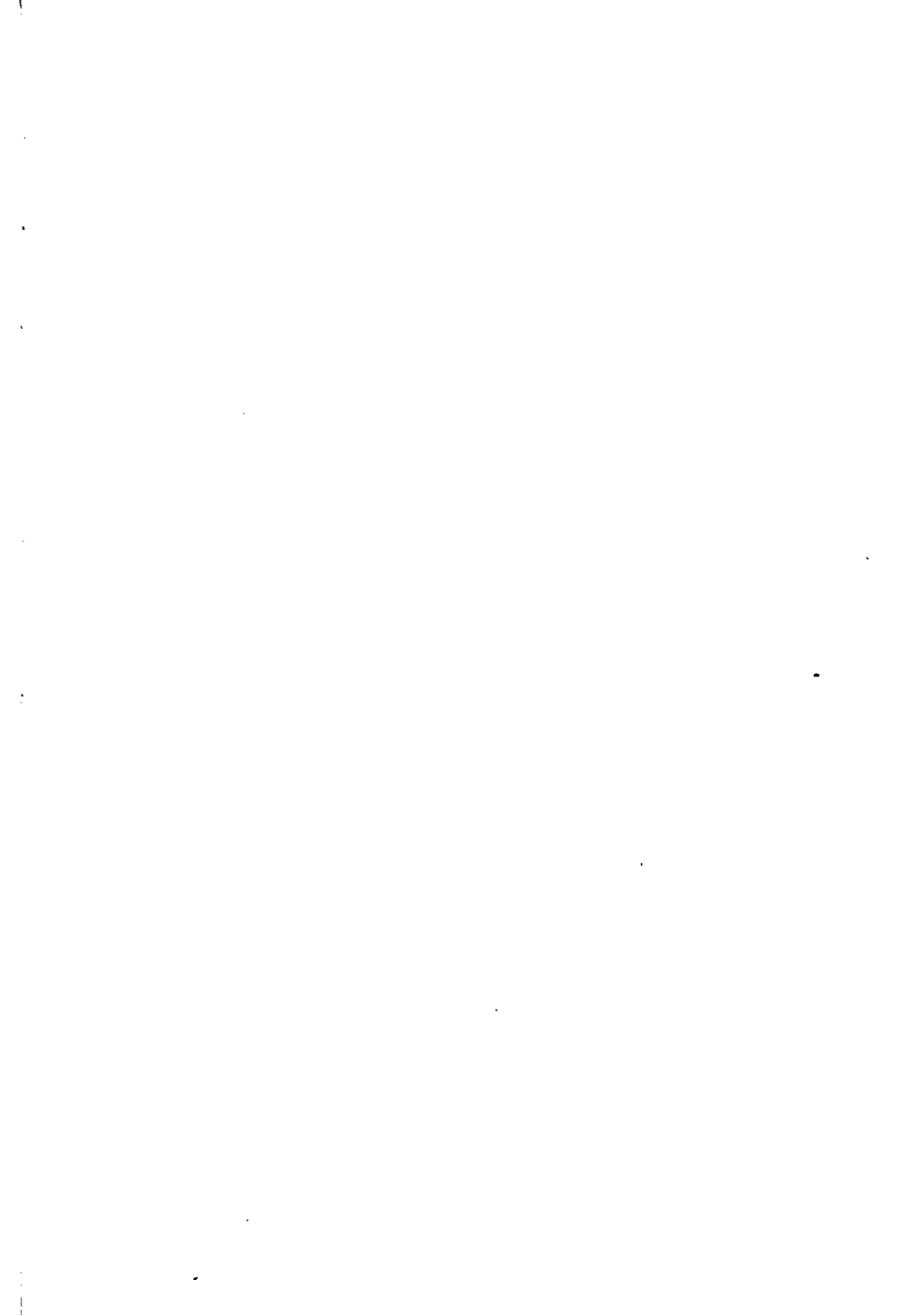
And—though no new poet be a prophet in
his own country, and though all great revivalists
or reconstructors of an art must be prepared
for initial doubtings and denials—have not

RHODOPE.

She stood to watch the thin waves mount her feet
 and 'gan to meet
The freshness of the water cool, and sighed
For pleasure as the little rippling tide
Lapped her about.

(The Story of Rhodope).





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Morris's mystical heroines—nameless miracles of beauty out of faery-lands forlorn—a more subtle charm, a more enduring sway, than the everyday damsels of court or cottage who are celebrated by less imaginative “makers”? To consider the *Earthly Paradise*—that consummation of the “vague and the mystical in form, colour, and sound,” set forth in words of the most child-like simplicity—is to hear and behold an endless procession, a moving pomp, “like pageantry of mist on an autumnal stream,” gorgeous with blazonry of colour, and resonant with strange exhilarating music. It is to listen once more, with the wonder of a child, to the old half-forgotten tales, classical and mediæval, brought down into one's touch and sight : it is the infusing of quick and throbbing vitality into the dry bones of dead romances, and the opening out of new strange vistas into dreamlands that we supposed were irretrievable. With the King,—having no name and needing none,—we sit breathless at *The Watching of the Falcon*,—

Till, with a start, he looked at last
About him, and all dreams were past ;
For now, though it was past twilight
Without, within all grew as bright

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As when the noon-sun smote the wall,
Though no lamp shone within the hall.

Then rose the King upon his feet,
And well-nigh heard his own heart beat,
And grew all pale for hope and fear,
As sound of footsteps caught his ear
But soft, and as some fair lady,
Going as gently as might be,
Stopped now and then awhile, distraught
By pleasant wanderings of sweet thought.

Nigher the sound came, and more nigh,
Until the King unwittingly
Trembled, and felt his hair arise,
But on the door still kept his eyes.
That opened soon, and in the light
There stepped alone a lady bright,
And made straight toward him up the hall.

In golden garments was she clad
And round her waist a belt she had
Of emeralds fair, and from her feet
She held the raiment daintily,
And on her golden head had she
A rose-wreath round a pearl-wrought
crown,

Softly she walked with eyes cast down,
Nor looked she any other than
An earthly lady, though no man
Has seen so fair a thing as she.

We go roaming down with Rhodope to the
iridescent ripples of the June sea, and await
some dim indefinable joy, as when,—

A DAY WITH WILLIAM MORRIS.

She stood to watch the thin waves mount her
feet

Before she tried the deep, then toward the
wide,

Sun-litten space she turned, and 'gan to meet
The freshness of the water cool, and sighed
For pleasure as the little rippling tide
Lapped her about, and slow she wandered on
Till many a foot from shore she now had won.

(The Story of Rhodope.)

Or we cower with Laurence trembling in
the shadows, while the glimmering procession
of the Dead Gods passes terribly from sea to
land,—daring, at all risks, to recover, the *Ring
Given to Venus*.

But William Morris does not take himself
at any exorbitant valuation. Whatsoever his
hand finds to do, he does with all his might,—
and leaves it at that. First in one art, then in
another, he strives to find expression : neither
praise nor blame can cloud his vision of the
ultimate end which he has set before him.
“Perhaps you think,” he told his mother once,
“that people will laugh at me and call me
purposeless and changeable : I have no doubt
they will, but I in my turn will try to shame
them, God being my helper, by steadiness and

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hard work." And thus it is with no sense of instability or restlessness that he puts down his pen, and proceeds to adopt another mode of expression. It is simply a change in the material, but not in the ideal, of his art.

He runs upstairs and takes a glimpse of the river,—now fully ablaze with summer sunshine,—from the five windows of his great, beautiful drawing-room, which runs the whole length of the house. This room is hung round with tapestry of his own weaving: it boasts a great painted settle and other articles of furniture such as give it a unique touch of character and individuality among the conventions of the latter 'seventies. It is one mass of "subdued yet glowing colour": yet its chief perfection is missing, in the shape of that stately and beautiful woman, Jane Morris, who is just now with her children, away at Kelmscott Manor. The human element is consciously lacking in this glorious apartment: and Morris realizes that. For although he prefers men's to women's society, and although his most intimate friend has declared that, "He doesn't want anybody. . . . He lives absolutely without the need of

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man or woman," yet Mrs. Morris is the very embodiment of her husband's most gracious imaginings,—and without her superb presence the house is but a tinkling cymbal. Morris, who ignores the existence of "society", who has never belonged to a club,—who, with the true artist's impatience in small matters, never knows how much or how little he has in hand, is dependent upon the presence of his beautiful wife far more than he allows or is aware of.

Now he is downstairs again and out-of-doors, a chorus of sweet garden-odours greeting him. A long rambling garden runs behind the house, with lawn and orchard and kitchen garden. Hammersmith is still but a suburban village, quaint, Georgian, unspoiled : from all the flower-beds of its little red-tiled houses delightful midsummer fragrances float by. The very barges as they pass along the river wear a holiday air, and spread their great red sprit-sails like one who expands his breast to meet pure breeze. Morris betakes himself to his coach-house and stables, which he has turned into a large weaving-room for carpet-looms. During the previous winter he has been carrying on

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the weaving of figured silks upon a Jacquard loom, pile-carpets upon this loom in the coach-house, and arras-tapestry upon the one in his bed-room,—simultaneously and in addition to his works at Queen's Square, where he dyes embroideries and silken fabrics. He is also engaged in the initiation of, or the execution of, designs and fabrications in such works as painted glass, tiles, furniture, furniture-velvets,—wall papers, chintzes, printed cottons and upholstery of all sorts. Not to mention a hundred projects of social reform begun or in progress,—an immense amount of reading in Icelandic literature,—and a quantity of minor affairs connected with all the above, such as few men could master or even attempt. He is demonstrating, *au pied de la lettre*, the significance of that celebrated rule which he avows will fit the case of everybody, "*Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.*"

A good hearty breakfast, including a tremendous quantity of tea, is Morris's next business in hand : and he gives it the same thorough attention as everything else that he undertakes.

MY LADY.

My lady seems of ivory
Forehead, straight nose, and cheeks that be
Hollow'd a little mournfully,

Beata mea Domina!

(Praise of My Lady).



REGINALD FRAMPTON

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He has been likened to Dr. Johnson for his inveterate love of tea-drinking : but he does everything on a big and expansive scale, and at other times of the day he drinks other liquors with equal relish, and smokes with supreme enjoyment. The strength and vitality and strenuousness of the man are apparent through all the smallest details of his life : he takes a robust delight in matters which to other men of feebler physique are incomprehensible. He does not affect any "lean and hungry" æstheticism, nor despise the pleasures of the table. He is himself a good cook and an authority on cooking, which he ranks among the fine arts whose fulness has been denied to women. When out upon those angling excursions which constitute his brief respites from work, he always will insist on cooking the fish he has caught : and his tastes are typically English. "I always bless God," says he, "for making anything so strong as an onion !"

It may be, indeed, that Morris's whole-hearted absorption in mundane matters as they pass beneath his notice,—his "spacious huge delight" in all things beautiful or desirable,—

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are, after some abstruse fashion, resultant from his haunting dread of death : that passionate revulsion from and revolt against the thought of inevitable mortality, which runs like a cold subterranean stream, with perpetual shuddering undercurrent, below his most opulent palaces of dream.

Ah ! what begetteth all this storm of bliss,
But Death himself, who crying solemnly,
E'en from the heart of sweet Forgetfulness,
Bids us, "Rejoice, lest pleasureless ye die.
Within a little time must ye go by,
Stretch forth your open hands, and while
ye live
Take all the gifts that Death and Life may
give !"

(The Earthly Paradise.)

He has himself observed that perhaps change and death are necessary, or there would be no good stories,—but this was a momentary outburst of philosophy far removed from his authentic feeling. Change and decay and death are altogether repugnant to him : all that creates misery and poverty and hatred between man and man he loathes. And while resolutely avowing himself "a London bird : its soot has been rubbed into me," and yet doing

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his utmost to provide things beautiful in a commonplace and beauty-careless age, all the while this heavy, boisterous, over-powerful man is dreaming, dreaming, dreaming. "My work," he has confessed, "is the embodiment of dreams,—to bring before people's eyes the image of the thing my heart is filled with." . . . What is this image? An *Earthly Paradise*, neither more nor less : a haven of peace and unfading loveliness, a Land of Heart's Desire, immune from Time and Death. *The Hollow Land*, that prose romance which nobody having once read can ever forget, closes upon this one great keynote of all his dreams, where lover and beloved enter the "Hollow City."

Through the golden streets under the purple shadows of the houses we went, and the slow fanning backward and forward of the many-coloured banners cooled us : we two alone. . . . At last we came to a fair palace, cloistered off in the old time, before the city grew golden, . . . cloistered off from the eager leaning and brotherhood of the golden dwellings. . . . Unchanged, unchangeable were its marble walls, whatever else changed about it.

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We stopped before the gates and trembled, and clasped each other closer ; for there among the marble leafage and tendrils that were round and under and over the archway that held the golden valves, were wrought two figures of a man and woman, winged and garlanded, whose raiment flashed with stars ; and their faces were like faces we had seen or half seen in some dream long and long and long ago, so that we trembled with awe and delight ; and I turned, and seeing Margaret, saw that her face was that face seen or half seen long and long and long ago ; and in the shining of her eyes I saw that other face, seen in that way and no other long and long and long ago—my face.

And then we walked together toward the golden gates, and opened them, and no man gainsaid us.

And before us lay a great space of flowers. . . .

Such is the true ideal—however impossible of attainment it may be, perhaps it is all the

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dearer for that—of this strange mass of contradictions, William Morris—this combination of the ultra-imaginative and the ultra-practical. Constitutionally fierce and violent of temper, he is constitutionally desirous of an ultimate and unending calm : filled with the wild vigour and delight of battle, he expresses himself in the most deliberately unemotional words. You cannot guess whether he is putting a mighty constraint upon himself, or fulfilling, in the medium of sound and form, his own conception of perfection. You can only echo his mysterious music :

Christ keep the Hollow Land
All the summer-tide ;
Still we cannot understand
Where the waters glide ;

Only dimly seeing them
Coldly slipping through
Many green-lipp'd cavern mouths,
Where the hills are blue.

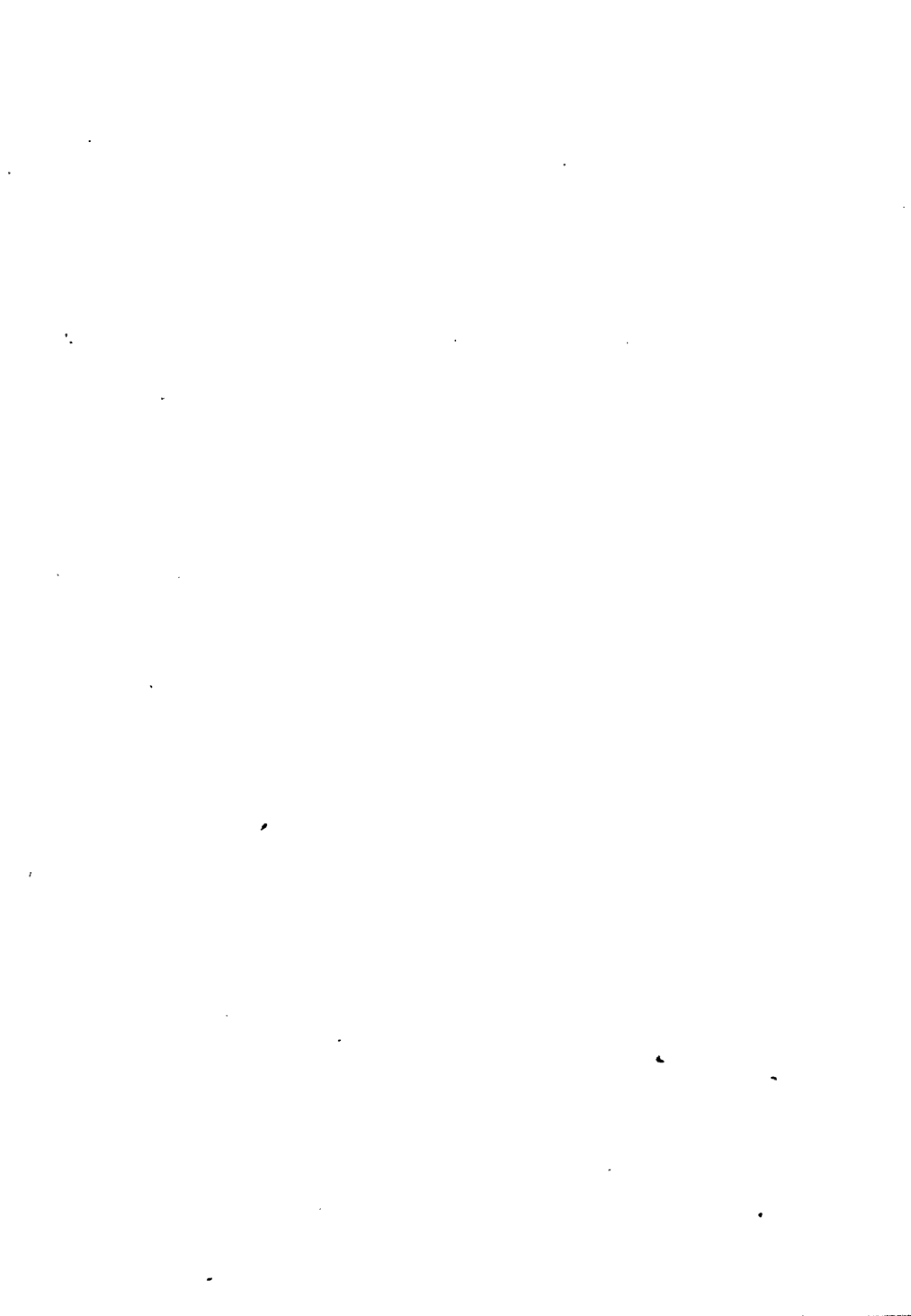
It is this blend of anomalies, no doubt, which makes the mind of William Morris such a curious *terra incognita* to all those who have to do with him. He presents to them so strange

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a union of aspects inherently antagonistic to each other; that men regard him more as an elemental force, dominating and inspiring them by dint of a powerful personality, than one to be reckoned with as a human being. The allure-ment of magnetic charm, so often bestowed upon feebler intellects, is in a measure denied to him : he stands for an abstract influence rather than a lovable individuality. That tremendous influence, destined to permeate and revolutionize English and even European ideas of decorative art, is only beginning as yet to make itself felt : but Morris's friends are vaguely aware of the urgent energy which drives him towards some goal unseen of them. Even as those filmy expressionless eyes of his are possessed of preternaturally quick sight, far exceeding that of the average men : so his abnormally acute mind, with the prescience of true genius, darts on ahead into "regions Cæsar never knew," and his most faithful admirers often have "a sense of being dragged at his heels, perplexed and out of breath." They cannot hope to follow such sweeping, swooping flight. "He is really a sort of Viking," says one of them, "set down here and making

THE KNIGHT AND MARGARET.

I gather'd and held in my arms great sheaves of
the daffodil,
And when I came again my Margaret lay there still.
I piled them high and high above her heaving breast.
(*The Wind*).





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art because there is nothing else to do." The trivialities and conventionalities of middle-Victorian London have absolutely no meaning for this master-craftsman : he belongs to some other sphere. . . .

The morning is spent by Morris at the carpet-loom,—directing, superintending, or working with his own hands. He allows himself a few minutes' recreation at bowls in the garden, but finds the sun too hot. After lunch he is off to Queen's Square, to visit his dyeing works there, and to look in upon his friends the Faulkners : not a day passes but he visits them. Matters of business must also of necessity be discussed,—always a tedious and impatient affair to Morris, who, himself "the very soul of honour, truthfulness, and justice," detests any details of trafficking. Here you encounter more of his contradictory traits. For human want and woe in the abstract he has the most passionate sympathy : toward human needs in the concrete he is absolutely close-fisted. "Do you know," to quote Rossetti's remark, "that 'Topsy' has never yet been known to give a single penny to a beggar?" Upon all the ex-

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igencies and expenses of work, he is ready to be lavish on occasion : he will employ the almost unemployable without hesitation, even as, the while, he expends himself and his own labour without stint. But penury, apart from the prospect of relieving it *en masse*, finds no responding benevolence in him : and of that reckless, spendthrift habit so incident to men of great genius, which finds a vent in careless, extravagant charity, he has not the slightest touch.

Had to-day been Wednesday, Morris, by invincible habit, would have dined with Burne-Jones ; but, it being only Tuesday, he betakes himself back home to Hammersmith as the evening draws on. A remarkable figure he presents, among the fashionable frequenters of the West-End, as he strides steadily along the crowded streets in his soft felt hat and rough blue serge suit. "Topsy," according to his intimates' dictum, has an unlimited "capacity for producing and amassing dirt," and his appearance is unquestionably grubby. He looks, in consequence, something between a working engineer and a sailor, with a strong dash of the latter, for whom he is occasion-

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ally mistaken : and the unkempt, picturesque slatternliness of the man is in keeping with either of these occupations : so that there is really nothing *outré* about him. It is only when (very rarely) he has condescended to assume the orthodox silk hat and frock coat, that Morris has candidly appeared ridiculous : anything more bizarre than this conjunction can hardly be imagined. . .

He crosses the upper hall and regards with satisfaction his ugly Georgian house : ugly as it may show without, he knows it a treasury of beauty within. A certain sense of emptiness strikes across his mind,—he remembers that the beautiful woman who rules these glowing rooms will not be there to receive him,—she whose portrait he has painted, not on canvas as Rossetti did, but in lines of power and pathos, *Praise of my Lady* :

My lady seems of ivory
Forehead, straight nose, and cheeks
that be
Hollow'd a little mournfully,
Beata mea Domina !

A DAY WITH WILLIAM MORRIS.

Her forehead, overshadow'd much
By bows of hair, has a wave such
As God was good to make for me.

Beata mea Domina !

Nor greatly long my lady's hair,
Nor yet with yellow colour fair,
But thick and crisped wonderfully :

Beata mea Domina !

Heavy to make the pale face sad,
And dark, but dead as though it had
Been forged by God most wonderfully

—*Beata mea Domina !*—

Of some strange metal, thread by thread,
To stand out from my lady's head,
Not moving much to tangle me.

Beata mea Domina !

Beneath her brows the lids fall slow,
The lashes a clear shadow show
Where I would wish my lips to be.

Beata mea Domina !

. . . He paces round the gardens, noting
with expert eye the growth and condition of
their contents : for he knows "all the ways
and capabilities of flowers, vegetables and fruit-
trees," which he studies with the fourfold

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interest of decorator, poet, earth-lover and culinary connoisseur. Finally, while dusk is drawing a veil over the river, he enters his study, and takes up with interest the manuscript he left unfinished at early morning. He is absolutely free from vanity regarding his own productions in any kind: eulogy is lost upon him. A task completed is *un fait accompli*, and must be judged on its own merits, which are not the author's. So he now observes of his poem, "That's jolly!" with entire simplicity and detachment. He determines to continue his work upon it after dinner.

It is nearly midnight when Morris leans out once more from his bedroom window, as he leaned at morning, and drinks in deep breaths of the fragrant air. The wind sighs to and fro in the elm-leaves, minutely plaintive, with a murmur of "old unhappy far-off things," the only hint of sadness in all that overbrimming joy of summer. To Morris the wind has always held this sorrowful undertone,—this wandering quest of something obscurely unattainable, as when it companions the knight in his blossom-burial of the beloved.

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I kiss'd her hard by the ear, and she kiss'd
me on the brow,
And then lay down on the grass, where the
mark on the moss is now,
And spread her arms out wide while I went
down below.

*Wind, wind! thou art sad, art thou kind?
Wind, wind, unhappy! thou art blind,
Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.*

And then I walk'd for a space to and fro on
the side of the hill,
Till I gather'd and held in my arms great
sheaves of the daffodil,
And when I came again my Margaret lay
there still.

I piled them high and high above her
heaving breast,
How they were caught and held in her
loose ungirded vest!
But one beneath her arm died, happy to be
so prest! . . .

Again I turn'd my back and went away for
an hour;
She said no word when I came again, so,
flower by flower,
I counted the daffodils over, and cast them
languidly lower.

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My dry hands shook and shook as the
green gown show'd again,
Clear'd from the yellow flowers, and I grew
hollow with pain,
And on to us both there fell from the sun-
shower drops of rain. . . .

Alas ! alas ! there was blood on the very
quiet breast,
Blood lay in the many folds of the loose
ungirded vest,
Blood lay upon her arm where the flower
had been prest.

*Wind, wind ! thou art sad, art thou kind ?
Wind, wind, unhappy ! thou art blind,
Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.
(The Wind.)*

But to-night the wind is clamant with subdued, strange voices, music out of other times, such as that mediæval minstrelsy which touches Morris as no modern music may. He stares with utter satisfaction into the opaque mid-summer night. . . . The whole world is spread out before his thought,—visible, odorous, suffused with secret warmth and colour, mapped out in exquisite uniformity of intricate form.

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Above him the stars throb rhythmically : ~~all~~ is changed and altered : the night is lovelier than the day. "It is as though the old earth and heavens are gone," says he to himself, "and there are new heavens and earth. What goes on there ? Who shall say, of us who only know rest and peace by toil and strife ? and what shall be our share in it ? Well, sometimes we must needs think that we shall live again ; yet, if that were not, would it not be enough to think that we helped to make this unnameable glory, and lived not altogether deedless ? "

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And "not altogether deedless," of a verity, William Morris lies down, and is immediately sound asleep.



A RETROSPECTION

past and the present are within the field of my inquiry, but what a man may do in the future is a hard question to answer. Mrs. Stapleton has heard her husband discuss the problem on several occasions. There were three possible courses. He might claim the property from South America, establish his identity before the British authorities there, and so obtain the fortune without ever coming to England at all; or he might adopt an elaborate disguise during the short time that he need be in London; or, again, he might furnish an accomplice with the proofs and papers, putting him in as heir, and retaining a claim upon some proportion of his income. We cannot doubt from what we know of him that he would have found some way out of the difficulty. And now, my dear Watson, we have had some weeks of severe work, and for one evening, I think, we may turn our thoughts into more pleasant channels. I have a box for 'Les Huguenots.' Have you heard the De Reszkes? Might I trouble you then to be ready in half an hour, and we can stop at Marcini's for a little dinner on the way?"

THE END



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